

Eye of Dominion

A Labyrinth of Labyrinths Novel
Book Two

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Other Titles by this Author

Fuel to the Fire trilogy:

[Fuel to the Fire \(book 1\)](#)

[Ruler's Desire \(book 2\)](#)

[Elemental Cascade \(book 3\)](#)

Labyrinth of Labyrinths series:

[Alloria \(book 1\)](#)

Stand alone:

[Imperfect Strangers \(Adult: psychological thriller\)](#)

[Void \(Adult: psychological mystery\)](#)

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I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths,
of one sinuous spreading labyrinth
that would encompass the past and the future
and in some way involve the stars.

- Jorge Luis Borges



CHAPTER

1

Alloria woke with a gasp, the scream still echoing in her mind having failed to escape the confines of her throat. For the fourth night since returning to the planet of her birth, the black tendrils of Vrengin's dark spirit had infiltrated her dreams and haunted her with threats of vengeance. *Nothing to worry about*, her true father had stated only yesterday, downplaying Alloria's concern that the dream might be prophetic. *The man is well and truly dead*, Ymarid assured, *he can do you no harm*. Despite Ymarid's assurance, Alloria could not let go of the fear that such a dark wizard would want vengeance, even after death, even though she hadn't been directly responsible for Vrengin's death; the power that had ended his life had come from the amulet, not from her.

Cautiously closing a hand around the space where the amulet should have rested on her chest, she opened one eye, only by the slightest crack, half expecting to see the tall dark wizard looming over her bed. She saw only the ceiling of her bedroom in the cottage where she had grown up. It had never been a more welcome sight. Even more welcome, however, was the sound of Bainberry's laughter, a sound that seemingly shook the walls of the dwelling.

"You're a lucky man, Thomas," she heard Bainberry say, the rumbling boom of his voice as large as the man himself.

Glancing at the rag doll propped against the foot of her bed, Alloria gave a resolute nod and forced her voice to go as deep as it would. "And that's the truth," she stated. Fractions of a moment later, Bainberry said the exact same words. That she knew him so well brought a huge smile to her face.

Throwing back the covers, Alloria dragged on her trousers. She rushed around the bed, fastening the buttons as she went. Slipping her feet into her boots, she bolted for the door without fastening the laces, only realising at the last moment that she was still wearing her nightdress. Yesterday, when the big man had visited, she had been fast asleep and had not woken until long after he had departed. Determined not to miss him today, cursing the time she was taking, she ripped the frilly garment over her head and dragged in its place yesterday's creased over-shirt. Once more she bolted for the door, flung it crashing against the foot of the bed, and clattered down the stairs, half-heartedly tucking in the shirt as she descended.

"Bane," she yelled as she rushed across the kitchen and out through the back door, squinting against the bright sunlight as she looked across the garden, expecting to see him already disappearing into the surrounding trees.

"Morning, Grot Queen," said Thomas, nudging Alloria's friend, Nathan, and chuckling as he took in her tangled hair and twisted garments. "You wouldn't believe what we have sitting in our midst: why, we have a giant that wandered from the woods to say hello."

"Bane." Alloria rushed around the garden table, leapt onto Bainberry's lap and flung her arms as far around him as she could reach, squeezing hard and long before turning and leaning her elbows on the table, her chin resting in the cup of both hands. She smiled at Nathan with purposeful intent and then looked at Thomas. "No use telling me those tales anymore, Papa. We've seen scary stuff for real, haven't we Nat?"

"Yep."

"Haven't we, Bane?" she said, swivelling her head to look up at her giant friend.

"We have that, Miss," Bainberry chortled, his heavy slab jaw and protruding tusk-like canines forming an expression of feigned horror. "We have that."

Alloria once more faced her papa, a beaming smile of told-you-so on her face.

"Ah!" Thomas replied, leaning his chair onto two complaining legs. "You have seen much, it would seem, experienced much no doubt, and yet you still haven't confronted the dwarves that stole all your spinning tops."

Alloria rolled her eyes, and looked on gleefully as Thomas pulled his pipe from his top pocket: a sure sign that he was about to tell one of his tales. Her papa paused only slightly, leaning the chair a tad further to glance around the lone tree that stood in the middle of the lawn at the rising clatter of hen noise coming from the shed at the bottom of the garden. When Bessy exited the shed with a clutch of eggs, Thomas turned back to Bainberry and continued preparing his pipe.

"You wouldn't believe, Bane..." Thomas continued, pausing with distraction as he compacted the tobacco with his thumb, "how many spinning tops I've made for this girl.

Every one of them lost in the woods, every one of them snatched by dwarves. Why if I had a copper quarter for—”

“Thomas! I hope you’re not thinking of lighting that thing at the breakfast table?” Bessy’s snapping tone prompted Thomas to draw his neck into his shirt and grimace like a wide-mouthed toad. “And put that chair on four legs,” she added.

“Ribbet,” Thomas replied, slipping the pipe back into his top pocket.

Alloria squealed with laughter as Thomas leaned to the side in expectation of a scutch from Bessy.

“And I don’t know what you’re laughing at, young lady,” Bessy admonished. “Get back up them stairs and brush your hair. And if you must wear a shirt intended for a boy, at least put on a freshly laundered one.”

“But Mama, Bane’s here.”

“And he’ll be here still when you’ve tidied yourself up. He’s staying for breakfast. That strange father of yours is coming too, supposedly.”

Father. Alloria juggled the word in her mind and thought about the meaning of it. Father had an altogether different ring to Papa. Father sounded more like an official title, or a badge of honour, whereas Papa sounded more of a nurturer, someone in a caring role. Even over the course of the past year, almost a year and a half, she hadn’t quite got used to the idea that Thomas and Bessy Merryweather were not her natural parents. It transpired that she was a Habalan by birth – the daughter of a wizard, the daughter of the First Wizard – and a Merryweather by a twist of fate, an intervention of spirits, that had led her at the age of three to the cellar of the couple who had raised her.

“Didn’t have to brush my hair or change my clothes for a whole year,” Alloria muttered as Bessy entered the kitchen.

“No,” Bainberry bellowed, rising from his seat as he lifted Alloria onto his shoulder. “But we were busy escaping dark wizards and fighting terrible monsters.”

The giant of a man snatched Nathan from the chair, lifted him in the crook of his arm and took off down the garden with them both, growling and bellowing as he went. “Dwarves. Dwarves,” he yelled, Alloria and Nathan laughing on the bounce of his strides. “Dwarves. I have two grotty kids to swap for spinning tops.”

As Bainberry ran back in the direction of the cottage Alloria saw Bessy emerge from the kitchen and lean into Thomas’s shoulder. “It’s good to have her back safe,” she heard Bessy say. Alloria’s newly discovered gift of magic brought sound to the movement of Bessy’s mouth. A simple trick taught to her by Ymarid, and not truly magic, but about all she could manage to conjure at will as yet.

“It is that,” Thomas agreed. Patting his wife’s hand as it stroked his cheek. “Her and Nat both.”

Bainberry set Alloria down as he came to a panting halt. “Now, little Miss,” he said, trying his utmost to sound serious. He took a dramatic pause, as he crouched and looked into her eyes, a straight-lipped smile crinkling the wide scar that ran down the left side of his face from brow to eye to chin. “Do as your mother tells you. I want to see sleek golden hair that gleams as brilliantly as your green eyes sparkle. I think you’ve been a grot queen for long enough.”



C H A P T E R

2

Yrion Habalan leaned on the tower wall and looked down upon the freshly cleared patch of woodland, a scar that now housed a dwelling better suited to a different world. *Cottage*, he believed they called it, the kind of home that did not belong here, the kind of home that most certainly belonged in a world without magic. He watched the First Wizard, his father, Ymarid, emerge from the trees and cross the neatly clipped grass, his white cloak rippling as he lifted an arm in greeting to the ugly brute, Bainberry, presently chasing his recently returned sister and her non-gifted friend around the garden. He grimaced as Alloria's adoptive parents stepped up to his father. The man shook Ymarid's hand and the fat woman had the audacity to pull him into an embrace.

Yrion closed his eyes and bunched his lips as he heard the door behind him open and close with resounding clunk. A rattling, wet breath accompanied the sound of a walk that favoured one leg much more than the other followed the closing of the door. Yrion looked skyward, and inhaled a long draw of irritation. He clenched his fists, and in his forearms felt the bulge of muscle that to his mind marked a transition from boy to man.

"A touching scene, is it not?" A thick phlegmy gurgle bubbled beneath the words, a glutinous sound that made Yrion want to clear his own throat. "Fair touches my heart, young Yrion. Fair touches my heart, you know."

Yrion continued to look down into the glade to see Josclan emerge from the trees. When Glebester leaned his warty elbow on the wall, Yrion glanced to the side and grimaced as he noted that the man's flesh was almost touching his. Hearing Glebester suck on his fat slug-

like lips, Yrion kept his gaze fixed on the wall, quickly shifting his eyes back to the glade when a glob of Glebester slime splattered on the sun-baked stone.

Ever since that day in Glebester's study, ever since Yrion had placed his hand on the clawed-eye, there had been no escaping the man. Wherever Yrion went, whatever Yrion did, Glebester saw. There was no avoiding his scrutiny.

"What do you want, Glebester?"

"Ah! Straight to the point, eh? Good man. Good man." Glebester snorted a rattle of phlegm, captured it in his throat, and then swallowed with an emphasised gulp. "Merely here to offer a little solace, my friend. Saw you watching them. Your mother recently lost to the spirits and now your father, besotted with your sister to the point where he has little time left for you. Fair touches my heart. Touches my heart, I say."

Yrion turned to face Glebester, wrenching his gaze from his father and sister and the gleeful collective seated at a table that was set to the rear of the cottage. His disgust as he took in Glebester's slug grey lips, cracked and oozing yellow pus, was apparently obvious, for Glebester began massaging them with his dimpled hand, the same hand that had previously been wiping beads of slime over the thin strands of inky black hair on his head.

"I beg your forgiveness," said Glebester, sticky strings of spittle stretching web-like in the corners of his mouth. "This strong sunlight, you know. Disturbs my homeostasis." Glebester indicated an area near the wall by the door, before slicking more slime from his scalp and flicking it to the ground. "Perhaps we might take to shadow?"

"Go away," Yrion snarled. "Just leave me alone." The young wizard turned to look back upon the breakfast scene, brilliantly lit by the morning's glorious sunlight. Noting they were all seated, even Josclan, Yrion turned away from the glade and looked down on the lake. As flat as a mirror, it reflected the white dwellings that climbed the hill on the opposite shore and formed the city of Xsanderumn. The morning was silent but for the constant rush of water that dived into the lake having passed by the tower where the bones of the ancients rested. Above him, dwarfing even the palace of representatives, the mountain climbed to an ice-covered peak that gleamed like polished silver against a clear blue sky.

Glebester hobbled into the shaded area, leaving Yrion standing alone in the glaring heat by the wall. "We have unfinished business, you and I, young Yrion. Unfinished business. You promised me transportation."

"And you promised I'd be First Wizard," Yrion snapped, turning and heading in Glebester's direction, a glimmer of wizard's fire boiling in his eyes, his hands raised, sparks of blue light flicking from finger to finger. A blast of pain shot to Yrion's temple and instantly stopped his advance.

Glebester drew the clawed-eye from his pocket, his thumb applying a little pressure on one of the talons, making it distort the sculptured orb while not quite piercing the surface. Slightly more pressure put Yrion on his knees. Kneeling there, Yrion wondered – not for the first time – if actual death would be preferable to the constant threat of death. Much as he thought it would be preferable, however, he couldn't quite force himself down that avenue of choice.

“Actually...” Glebester began, pausing for emphasis as he slipped the clawed-eye back into his pocket, notably keeping his hand in there too, “I made no such promise. No such promise, I tell you. I merely assured you that I would influence the vote that was to allow your father's sacrifice, a vote that would have led to you becoming First Wizard had it concluded in your father's demise. That his sacrifice proved unnecessary has no bearing on our deal. No bearing, I tell you. You are indebted to me, and at some point you will transport me through the labyrinth.”

Yrion huffed and shook his head. “You're as big a fool as Josclan, that oaf of a false guardian that follows Father around. We can gain access to the labyrinth now that Father has the amulet back. All you need do is petition for entry. Exit does not require an amulet, as you well know.”

“You have a weak memory, Yrion. A weak memory, you know. There are other matters I wish to attend to before travelling to my home planet. There are many places I wish to visit. You will transport me, as agreed.”

“And how do you expect me to do that? I'm not First Wizard. I will not be First Wizard as long as my father decides he wishes to be, which will be for many years yet, hopefully. So either petition my father for access and go home now, you horrid man, or leave me be until I am First Wizard. When that day comes I will transport you... if I decide not to kill you.”

“Ah! The young wizard has confidence.” Glebester laughed long, stopping only when the wet rattle in his throat broke into a spluttering cough. “I'm no fool young Yrion and you know it. Magnanimous as I am, however, I will let that negative comment pass. Confidence you have in spades, yes, but sadly your confidence is unfounded.”

Glebester threw Yrion a glib smile, putting his bloated lips under pressure and squeezing from them worms of yellow pus. His bloated grey tongue darted from his mouth, removing the oozing gunk while adding at the same time a coat of protective moisture.

“What do you mean, unfounded?” Yrion ambled back to the wall and leaned against it, his elbows resting on the hot stone, his chin elevated to an appropriate level of arrogance, his shoulder length hair hanging loose and straight. “Of course I'll be First Wizard one day; I am the most powerful of my generation.”

“As was Vrengin of his.” Glebester drew his chin into his chest, his slime-slicked flesh gathering in folds. Placing a hand to the base of his neck he expelled a fetid belch and visibly forced shut his gullet to prevent the rise of bile. “The food here is far too rich, not nearly enough insects. Yes, as Vrengin was, you know. Powerful, that is. And yet your Father was the one elected to First Wizard by the council.”

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t know. My father has many years left in him, but I will be First Wizard, eventually. There is no Vrengin standing in my way.”

“No Vrengin, no. But you do have competition. Yes, competition, and from your sister, no less. I have it on good authority that she is the one favoured to become First Wizard. Favoured, I tell you.”

Yrion cast a glance over his shoulder at the sunlit breakfast gathering. He strode over to the wall on his left and looked across at Xsanderumn knowing most of the houses there were empty, their prior occupants having died when Vrengin almost successfully choked this planet. Yrion took in the lake and the tower where most of the ancient wizards who had created the labyrinth rested. Finally he turned to face Glebester, his face a picture of contempt. “Rubbish,” he snapped. “There’s never been a female First Wizard and there never will be.”

Glebester wiped a trickle of pus from a burst boil on his cheek and smeared it on his trousers amid the crusty stains of prior wipes. He leaned forward and looked up into Yrion’s eyes. “Trust me, unless we act... unless we act in the appropriate way, Alloria will be First Wizard.”

“You don’t know that.”

Glebester offered no further argument, but the narrow smile of satisfaction that came to his bloated lips spoke volumes.